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TOWER SERIES NUMBER TWO

Children Passing

RICHARD EMIL BRAUN : *Children Passing*

with woodcuts by ROBERT WYSS

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These are for you
who find in them
not novelty
but confirmation

ORACULAR

Over the honored bones of Boston (resting,
as we say) old leaves' bones
underfoot are restless; and boys and schoolgirls
going home splash through them,
reciting alphabet lately received.
They run the known, intone
the unsure patterns, repeat the magic,
nearly Grecian syllables;
and little winds are winding up their strident
lmno, R, S, T.

She was no snowy witch, but young and turning,
a mother-dear more dear now
incipiently frosty; witches most live
when she died, October;
primly colonial, Mother Goose's grave;
who did not rhyme or gather
the pages vainly: what mantic abc's
she told she dared make charming
only to spell her children's moral lives.
The children passing sing
the future, certainly, but knowing nothing
(as the lore requires)
and recommending nothing as they are
merely oracles
spelling their letters' lives, not telling theirs.
They have their own games
not of the elder nation; certain cobwebs
accommodate the young,
and special weeds; and these who chant now know
no gentle Sibylla
but many seemingly answering leaves.

What there will be of signs,
of sounds so flighty and so friable,
the letters as the leaves,
boys and girls as letters, and of late
Boston's honorable
cinders, laid quietly and always restless:
maybe a daisy, my dears,
or a white carnation, or only an
unanswerable tenderness.

Each crisp, stiff, steady, silent beetle
of the six yellow, black-striped beetles
(with golden eyes) in voluptuous
concatenation on a tipping
hollyhock leaf, displays, by an
individualistic swishing
of its antennae, what is presumed
to be the single, collective joy.

Now I am old you'll look to me for beauty;
you'll want a metric close, a final turn
to ground suspended cadences. I warn
you, though: clear statement isn't clarity.
I know now youth is vague anticipation.
When young I wrote some twenty novels that
concerned integrity of motive, but
this had a vagueness, hollowness I shun
today; so now, in verse, I won't protract
the riddles I posed then. This is direct
approach, no idealistic clutch for beauty;
rather, a promenade in faces or
red silk, black velvet, onyx and cinnabar
creates my world . . . of sensitivity.

The old need not have wisdom; don't demand
it; don't expect that youth have passion either.
When I was twenty-five I didn't gather
petals or pink clouds, I made a trend
in letters. Aged now, my head still sound
however, sickliness has taught me neither
assume a principle or reason, rather
accept the resonance and doubt the mind
and know that sex is wholly something more
than having it, that bald intrusion where
the one accomplishment is finding no
two of one species are compatible
no matter what their habits: Meaningful
conjunction would be that of trees with snow.

Significant contact is not in false
and tentative union of hog on sow:
homogenous engendering further fowl
or further swine; it doesn't even pulse,
for all their loveliness, when panthers mix.
Significant contact occurs with fly
and flower, combining both lust with style
and actual autonomy with sex.
An only slightly less beautiful junction
(marred only by its cruel progeny)
was that one Pasiphae enjoyed: the motion
of tragedy in this affair forgotten
for sheer ambition and for ecstasy
that huge, elusive, pure white stud had given.

10 This is sufficient pondering sensual
rapports, delineating what creates
from what binds nothing odd, only repeats
recurring kind and individual;
my age should draw the metaphysical
and show man as the full receptor species.
World bounded by skin, bounded by iris,
he needn't stay a passive thing at all,
an eye for shadow, passive, turning out
to vague extremity, vapor, deceit;
he may, yes actively invert to core
that is the real external; or, to put
it otherwise, can leap, a Fünklein, at
the source nearby, up to that whole grand Fire.

This isn't saying that arcana equals
beauty, the deepmost is all charm . . . except
regards treaties of spirit. I'll adopt
the opposite, in fact, for fleshly levels:
that what is always bare identifies
and has the purest charm, that faces, hands
have personality as real as trends
of character, are real identities.
These open things as open so are pure,
the beauty uncombined like melody
so rich it needs no backdrop; faces are,
hands are what eyes not, never shoulders nor
breasts are, these requiring harmony
the total's counterpoint must echo for.

This beauty that is naked, open, is
the physical resemblance essence has:
essential wholeness, being; beauty as
familiar conscience of identities.
And maybe persons may be, being whole,
be beauty: Just as hands, as faces will
be character, so people sometimes fill
out vagueness of abstractions. Beautiful,
essential, and entire are odium
in evil days: the soundness, nakedness
must be destroyed as people. See how Rome
acknowledged this, in Cicero, whose head
and hands displayed then by Antonius
could prove that all the Cicero was dead.

Now I am old I face like times, the dun
days, reign of grey insensitivity;
to these days I oppose my world as beauty,
late promenades through clarities to win
for your ghost, Friend in youth, a noble grave.
As you were beautiful, were whole, not one
persisting in a vague anticipation,
as you were sensitive, were pure, above
contrivance, not a mimicry, your light
was stifled: wind at treetops, noon dim as night.
There was no crime alleged: Idealists stilled you,
not for expression but for being so
much hands and face, so much clear statement. No
beauty you saw the beauty you were killed you.

Listen: what good is testimony now?
You heard him testify four years, the same
as thousands did. Do you remember when
a man shot him? I wasn't there, I heard
it on the air, but that night we all came
and we heard him proclaim he didn't care,
he knew his enemies and they knew him.

Now I was in the choir so I know things.
Like the diamonds on his left hand were quotes,
which in Hebrew means God, and the ruby rings
on his right were x and p, which signifies
Jesus Christ in Greek. When he gave a blessing
he locked hands to show Jesus inside the Lord
and he did likewise when he was healing.

But anyhow that night he was there wearing
a black sling and he said the Word and preached
on mercy. You remember those bad times.
Both our husbands were laid off. So you say
that he was rich then and had no charity.
But I can testify he had, because
that night I told him I had no more money.

And he said go to this house in Paradise
Valley and turn up the stairs in the alley.
And there was an old blind woman, wrinkled as
a fig, and breathed hard with her tongue, like a dog,
and she knew what I needed and she said
As many teeth you have, as many eyes,
if you know that much you know all you need.

Listen: what is charity? Charity
is giving what you don't have. He had nothing.
The special robes, holy rings, the Cadillac
were all on time and the Palace was rented,
and some say he's in jail now, and others
say New York, but anyhow two forty-two
came in that week for a thousand dollars.

You perished, in a toyland, of surprise;
and only I am here to bury you
in dessicated tulip tips and eyes
of broken diadie-dolls. Poor pink, poor blue!

Will you be grown when I'm in Heaven too?
Will length of death have turned you Classical
like old Bisque faces, keen and sainted view,
pearl on your breast, pearl-pointed linen shawl?

No, you'll still have your flowers with no stem,
and harp, clear stringed, the blur of *La Boheme*.
You'll heap upon that Mansion's mantlepiece
impossible plush animal creations,
and pout the pillared City's aberrations.
You rest a Classic, but of Wedgewood's Greece.

Trailing her father, bearing his hand axe,
the girl thought she had never
guessed what earthly majesty
was before

then, as he strode unconcernedly
holding a vicious gander
by the horny mitts and let
the big wings

batter his knees. She was also surprised
to feel a liberating
satisfaction in the coming
bloodshed, and

that notwithstanding all the times she had
been beleaguered and
had fled, today she did not fear
the barnyard hubub.

Yet, as her father's clever stroke fell, as
the pronged head skipped sideways
and the neck plumes stiffened with blood
from the cleft,

she was angry; and, when the headless goose
ran to the brook and was
carried off into the woods alive,
she rejoiced,

and subsequently frequented those woods
and avoided her father.
When the goose began to mend she
brought him small

hominy, which was welcome though she had
to press the kernels one
by one into the pink neck that
throbbed into

her palm; when haemorrhage occurred she would
not spare handkerchiefs,
and stanching the spot she felt a thrill
of sympathy.

But for the most part there was steady progress,
and growing vigor was
accompanied by restlessness,
and one cool day

the blind thing was batted out of existence
by a motorcycle.
She had no time for tears. She ran
upstairs to miss

her father's barytone commiseration,
then out onto the fields,
and, holding an old red pinwheel,
ran ran ran ran.

God's activity is said to be all
comprising and comprising all repose.
But for Creation—for Lake Michigan,
say, and me—activity (that is that
work we both do both for and with others)
is horror. You know how the lake shudders
and twists the boats and bends and crawls to reach
the children trying the beach. I'll tell you
another thing. One night I walked, in fear,
toward a lighthouse, with a person I love,
along a long, angular pier; and walking
(working rather, for it is work to go
an unsteady way with love to a doubtful
beacon somewhere) I came to know that there
must be a man standing at the lighthouse
landing, and we would fight, and I kill him.

God's repose (His isolation) is said
to be like work, a peace comprising all
activity. But all Creation—both
Lake Michigan and I, let's say—has found
repose unclean. You know how the lake settles
on summer nights. The lights lie motionless
beyond, while here the wings of butterflies
and bloated sunfish with no eyes clutter
the oily shore. I'll tell you more: In silence
and darkness I hear sighs of ghosts, I see
their trains (or only dust puffs in a draught)
wisp around bottles in the kitchen corner.

They say the holy glamor of words or things
parodies God's opaque truth ultimately,
while Satan's shapeless science would be baffled
but for Creation's perspicacity.
That is what you know. Now you should speak.
I told you commonplaces. Let those be.
What will you tell me of the lake, or the lake
of me? Or shall I ask again next week?

When ghosts are seen they are most often seen
in pairs, as though sad love
affairs were all the reason souls
wander naked.

Abruptly, from the corner of the eye,
unawares, you see them;
for if you think too quickly or
turn your head

you will have ruled out resubstantiation
of the dead and will
most likely see a squirrel shake
some high grass.

But couples make confusion: when you whirl
to face one one sways close
to you. (Look at a window for
your neighbor's face,

in the glass you see your own reflected,
look for your face, you see
the mannequin's, look for the street
you see your neighbor's

face.) No real love or real affairs
or matter of our fleshy
own brings these, who mostly come
unknown to us,

and who we say desire definitions
and slipped attitudes
such as we consider only
in our preposterous

moods. Knowledge is to know the past, wisdom
to know the dead; men who
see ghosts singly we call wise
or sacred; and

remembering our fuddling encounters
we attempt to guide them
from what treacheries endanger
unwary eyes.

You better go now, daddy. (Alright, alright.) Downstairs,
outside, below the name of the hotel there,
under a rectangular cover of bare white bulbs
that wink in series like a true marquee,
I wait, I watch mist, and hear traffic hiss
and nearby terrible blows of a whistle.
You'll likely forfeit your soul waiting in doorways,
so the old women down home say,
but there's the work I do regularly regardless:
black wig, yes Sir, and a red ball
straddling my nose, to stand in passages and expect
the worst; but this night's loitering is lonesomer.

The next time watch, you and your children; bother to watch
where the elephants swing in or the bareback-
riders; you'll see a number of us lounging there
for the sake of all of you. Imagine
that something final occurs. Remember
tents are tents; expectation exaggerates
events. So the gaffer blasts whistle, and that's our
signal; and you who think there's worse
to come, look to the gangways just as we commence.
I saunter in. My partner starts:
he thumps me; he bumps me; he kicks me where it hurts.
I rise, resume my hat, salute him, grin, shrug, bow.

And he thumps me; he bumps me; he kicks me where it hurts.
I thank him with eloquent, extravagant,
hand-sweeping, oriental obsequiousness
for leaving me one sour tooth to pivot
tobacco on, one un-macerated inch
of gut to wedge my trousers up, yes Sir.
I thank him often. Meanwhile, whatever happened
is doused or sopped or hustled out
and you people are happy and peaceful again.
This night, forsaking the portal
of the hotel (for the sake of my soul) I shamble
in the haze of a Northern metropolis toward

the sound of the railyard. A window squeals and strikes:
a woman's back recedes from the dark pane
as a carp recedes from a shadow on the river.
Up porches, down cellar stairs, from sidewalks
to window-boxes, up and down fire-escapes

and hollering around the tatters of gates,
moaning, the many city cats rampage: silent,
a boy with bleeding arm and ear
fades backward into a doorway. I watch a dozen
shapes appear. I dash down an alley.
The lonely pause: there's a problem for any night.
Between my hearing and my sight arises fear.

Better to light a paltry candle than curse the dark,
another down-home saying says that much,
and I declare my work has responded to it.
Though only two times in a dozen years
have I had to do that act, I've been made-up
and ready every hour in all your towns;
and there's been time for study and clear sight between,
and a life of innocence (except
restricted spells in gaudy hotels) and comradeship
such as outsiders wouldn't have.
Imagine the slow spin of quick little bells is done.
Imagine the calliope has exited.

What next, what now? A fanfare and a snare-drum roll.
Our sweat and satin and sequin Czarina
of the rods and rings in air, criss-crossing the channels
of the spotlights there, swoops once far outward,
till halted by a sustaining cable
she plummets, standing, to the safety-net,
while her upper quarter of skull goes catapulted
up to you. Yes Sir, that time I worked;
and again the day a panther went bad. Her fores
embrace his neck. Applause. She dangles
kissing him. (Applause.) Then one hind paw jerks. He falls.
Over the loops of his insides the trainer crawls.

A whistle sounds at the alley's end. I'm grabbed; I'm slammed.
I try to fight. *Better come along easy.*
(Alright, alright.) Those were cops. This is the hospital.
They say the boy is dead. Say what they will,
I know I'll never work again because
I feel I can't see things consequentially
because my eyes are fractured like an insect's eyes:
so all I see is tessellation
like nose and dominoes of an intern's face whom, when
he says *Man, you're a clown,* I answer
I am a clown; or he tells me *All this trouble is*
in your head, and I say My eyes are in my head.

I stood deciding that that is only
a misnomer to the ear
of the many who are misguided as to
its origin.

And properly so; for a dog (in the
flesh) that bolts and wheels and
goes imprecisely nevertheless in
a gyration

for tail or a flea is no appropriate
emblem of that which we
observe is a season consecrated to
ceremony.

Then the lady strolled past, who lives alone
in a large house on my block
and spends her mornings ironing magazines
with a steam iron;

then a small girl came out to sing, bouncing
a ball, arcing one then
the other leg over it neatly, slow, true
to the injunction

of a canicular sky; and I then
remembered the fearful
precision of spaniels in August when
fever seizes

them, and thought there might actually, in their
inevitable gait,
be adequate suggestion of the stately
to justify

that term to the many who hold a vision
of tropical decorum.
However I further knew that the son
of that fabled

widow is a bachelor who lives alone
one block away in his
own ample stucco; so as I watched her pass
I now thought not

of what I might well think if I knew no
astronomy, but of
the decency of my rocking chair and
the shady porch

and of the precisian herself who peeped
now right and again left
and smiled because she knew everything was
as it should be.

Sacred Heart across the corner was splendid
that afternoon and there,
I said, "There must be pretty young spiders,
leaving the pearly

nest high on a trefoil molding, gliding as
minuscule propositions
each to construct its geometrical
existence." And

now, madam, madam, thinking about you,
as I am, in an
indeterminate season (last night I
stepped on snow

that was only mistaken moonlight) I
marvel at those August
proprieties that seemed that day to be
capable

of making a processional even
of colloquial
perplexities; for I know you are turned
to serious business,

and I am aware both of your evening
vagaries and of
the consequent expatiations you
call ceremony.

There was no grave to haunt. We all told her.
Never mind. The park is good memorial.
Young fathers bring their brood on Sunday, and
the mothers are there every afternoon
with carriages and tatting. Never mind.

When we all told her, Lily I mean, how
Melena's husband has *that* hanging in
the cellar, Never mind, she said, and be
more cheerful in May. You never know all
the birds are doing, giggle as they will,
the buff ones. Once an Edison man fainted.
Melena's husband just leaves one sleeve hang.

Maybe it began when Lily took on
my Bill. I had the fever. She held him
and I sat alongside there by the duckpond.
She must have added one and one. I am
all sagging now but Lily looks a girl.
She goes alone now. Bill is only four.

Grave or no grave, you never can know. Men
go in cupolas. The company sends
a hundredweight of ingot. I know some
in holy ground. The birds do cry and hang
on near, they did before my mother died,
then flew off, and maybe that is fair
memorial. Steampipes have a way of tapping.

Lily reminds us this one had to grow
and change companions. First a ruby fly,
the second spring it was a bee. And then
a hummingbird that flew without a sound.
This May a sort of wild canary hovers
around her there to visit the old blood.

They have shown her facing, from a range of barley
at times and from the patio. She wrings a sprig
of mint in a walled garden; behold, the dimple that
none reckoned on, careless burdens of plums, of parsley.
I thank those gentlemen: many an old master
is needed if there shall be love. I thank Velasquez
more: for a woman turned away may be imposed
without disparagement in a prospect of grandeur.

Where this high cliff joins the deep sunlight I see you
beside me spread aside in the buoyant deer-moss;
I sit cross-legged nibbling juniper berries
and I call you my Louella now, now Ella Lou.
Far down from one rim is the bay with flocks of teal,
and we might look down shafts of cedar the other way;
I feel a privileged one who waits, remembering
the special pleasure of youth is of self-denial.

Since Velasquez and the masters have hexed my eyes
I see you now even in this northern grandeur;
following the hip I watch the flank's retirement
and watch the nape declining from the crescent shoulder.
But where your shoulder ripples back to fill the arm
is a slight plump area, probably nameless:
in all but rarest postures that form vanishes
into wherever you withdraw inopportune breaths.
You might not wonder it is there I, stretching forward,
beseeching you be motionless, hold the wide kiss;
I wonder mightily for my part for what purpose
have I stretched a thousand miles between the two of us.

WHO WALK

Like a midge on a ball in the air walking the surface,
too small to have been seen when the ball was hurled into motion,
now while the ball spirals toward the time it will fall or stop
still unseen and still in safety regardless of flight or peril of fall;
like a lord of the universe (in the order of a mote on an eye
which floats on the predictably moving globe in a wash that protects it)
a lord of the universe, then, who swims with no aim, slowly,
on the film of the face of the sphere the final rim of space constitutes;
resembling them, I say, I see you, Ella Lou, who walk,
walking alone along your ways on the skin of this world and safe
from harm.

To those who propose the constant shape of beauty is always
the varied promise of some pleasure, thus that the perception
of the beauty is a craving to partake of that pleasure,
I presume to counter that beauty is an annunciation of power,
thus that the perception of it is a desire to be that shape of power;
so to you I confide that such is the envious affection that moves me
in your praise (as I, an occasional, vulnerable
wanderer, regard the holy frivolity of your astounding shoes)
that I crave to be you, Louella, who walk (a mite, god, mote,
and idiot planet) moving intangible, safe in the night of the world.

In the colorful jungle of your brain, Louella,
jabbering with doves, a tiger (striped of smoke) batters
its cruel nose on cruel bamboo, and a babyfaced
elephant, floundering in the surly brake, gets
solicited by a hyena that dangles it
a bag of wedding-rings and gold teeth. Meanwhile, I
who have tired of running and running on my feet
of balloons, squashing things that are too soft anyhow
and hullabaloo too shrilly to be heard, sit down
once and for all under a baldachin of parrots
and methodical, mossy sloths, and watch jerky
capybaras fussing in puddles like children,
and watch certain real, chanting children as well,
who (too weak to walk) scram past me at a run, and fade
beyond into miles of nothing but tree-stumps.

Coming down the stairs
of the St. James Hotel
(for Ladies and Gentlemen)
exactly as he reached
the bottom of the stairwell
he saw a large roach
run then disappear,
and he was grieved to know
his approach had prompted
undisguised avoidance.

He stayed hushed and watched
sure soon some shy
overture would follow
as an afterthought
and at length release him.

Suppose though some roach
sized amply for him
had been there instead
and had accepted him
with sudden embrace of hooks
wet hair glutinous
segmented movements,
he surely would (he would
admit this if he heard it)
have panicked utterly.

He stood watching until
he understood it would
not soon reappear
then left much piqued
with vanity wounded.

Love may be boundless
and its vanity even
more promiscuous
and so more powerful,
but this man might do well
to prefer patent snubs
to the risk of awful contact
and be thankful fortune
sometimes restrains him
in safe uncertainty.

He was the end of a healthy madness,
that old old scholar of New Comedy
who published verses of Menander hidden
to all others by that smudged papyrus.
The younger Hellenists scorned his vision,
for he was bred in old philology
while they were students of a new indifference
and had no blood for this good German passion.

Courtly monuments of Alexander
were ragged napkins on the scholar's desk,
illegible and lodged in celluloid
until a visitation by the author
(snide reviewers wrote "apocalyptic")
revealed the text, but the old classicist
was strong in his tradition and declared
his method was the purest scientific.

There was student life in noisy cellars
once, and a pedantry of tune and beer
and brazen hair echoed the work of daytime
with its precious bricabrac. Philologers
would vaunt their close science and nice system
yet with a Faustian clarity they saw
these were refinements on a demon's game
of insight, humanized and set to custom.
Those were his days, he was their survival
who heard pure voices in his scraping pen;
discredit latterly arrived from those
who fear all lust over their own blood's level.

I think we need no longer spot naiads
or trace down poltergeists
to realize our intimate
echoings.

Today I found something on the floor
beside my bed. To all
appearances it was an old
bicuspid or

a piece of ginger root. But actually
it was a thing, completely
unidentifiable.
I must confess

I've been inhospitable. I broke
off one appendage then
attempted crushing the whole thing,
then stopped afraid

of having pain for pain somehow. I tried
to get it out of sight
but didn't manage. There it is.
Now I don't care.

Is it a likely thing, I wondered, That that
nine-year waif who dangles a lemon-
yellow plastic boat from the wharf is thinking
the words he says are astonishing
to the fat man and tired wife nodding
there, where the sun is heaviest?

He knows the words can be only a flutter
but he thinks those two are straining
to understand, muttered the fisherman
in the shade beside me, And have
to pretend to him they are not concerned
with the precious commentary.

He thinks both ways by turns and between times
he is angry to be wrong by turns
and angry you and you need not explain
your tackle, the fisherman's twelve-year-
old son said, eager to repudiate
his own childhood through betrayal.

An empty oriel seen from the road
sets me imagining a forlorn mansion
with powdery rugs gone mossy near the wall
pocked where the old time chair and table stood;
but let me see a lampshade or a rank
of knickknacks along the window and I
begin envisioning the rooms chockfull
of stuffs and furniture, and never think
till later that within this rim of objects
some other people are staring across
another gap into a subtle further
border of vacant household zones which relicts
are moved now wearily to occupy
and now to shun by much the same illusions
as I have had along an unfamiliar
road and through a pink and unfeeling eye.

The natives here enjoy a delicate
and tense society.
Their upper classes make an art
of conversation

so refined that no Caucasian ever
participates without
making at least one outrageous
faux pas.

Few Europeans, in fact, can manage
even the rudiments
of this language, which consists
of vowels only,

and, although several grammars have been composed
by reputable scholars,
these disagree on every major
point of syntax.

The chieftains are invariably stout:
a proverb says "Fat men must
be sure; doubt and misgivings need
agility."

The special term for this is rendered as
"complacency" in all
the lexicons, but is in no wise
derogatory.

I lingered in the gardenhouse
and heard the young in the arbor move
and their forms in the grey trees swayed
as I saw in a paper lantern glow
one laughing coterie leave to dance.

One time lying by a lakeside
I heard a nimble song recurring
over the evening cries of bathers.
Wandered from pine boughs on the hill
a cricket pale as the sand he was on
rang in the joy of resembled land.

So too in the gardenhouse I saw
in the glow of green crepe lanterns
a Luna resting move its wings.
And I remembered other days
when I had been in organdie
I stood at the window white in white
among the curtains and shared their commotion.

More lately while I watched light come
out of the window the afternoon
I saw dust move everywhere
except one gap the size of a hand
where something of light hòvered in light
as a bubble barring the dust and air.

I tell all this as comforting
whenever a younger nephew comes
naming me other and hidden dwellers,
the Tritons matched in deadly blue,
Cyrene in her glass green rooms.

After a downpour sometimes you can hear
trumpeting and hoots deep in the bush.
The winos at the station
say it's elephants,
but you know that's a lie.
Ask a native and he'll claim a tree has
gone mad. *Even the placid breadfruit may*
become a man-eater,
and if you pass too near
the branches sweep at you.

These natives marry with peculiar freedom.
One lad I knew lived with a bag of stones,
and I was present at
the wedding of twin girls
to abalone shells.
If you inquire how despite this practice
their race has avoided decimation
they laugh and wink and quickly
bring up some general topic
as though you were a child.

This was a true happening but (as you
will see shortly) not such as would ready me
for future ones. What has brisk disaster
to do with a leisurely ordeal?
Neither event, as you will notice also,
has made me an understanding man.
It was my watch one night, away then on
the sea, when leaning on a couple of crates
of something I dreamed of nothing special
into the dark, and whispered the smoke of a
sugared native product into the dark.
Then from behind a quick rush burst not six
feet over me with a sawing and then
a cracking sound, and the other watch
pointed up where a black squall ran port-side
into the distance and a six by six
crate lid veered and disappeared like a gull.
But the other time we were idle ashore
for days somewhere there are sandy foothills
and small plains with weeds that stand like birds,
and there was a steady blow on land
that left off out at sea, leaving us all
peculiar if I remember. The wind
rasped the dense whorls of sharp leaves low on the ground
and shrilled through the heads on the tall seed-stalks,
and all those days the sound rose until we,
without hope, without breath bore the conviction
that our sojourn had not begun and had
no end, like a period of dissipation.

In certain Spanish havens the beggars come
to you saying "Give me an amount. God
will make it good." Had they been wise those ladies
would have said something of that kind and proffered
a gratifying smile to their junior
treasurer the other Tuesday and maybe
been spared a peculiar fall. For forgetting
their cards or missing dues or due to rancor
from a month of planning they were turned away

from the luncheon which might have saved them through
its regular plaudits and calls to order.
Instead they turned immediately back
after some while waiting with other members
in vying groups where the sound rose and narrowed,
and from the dim hushed hall those five ladies,
my individual patrons, came across
the park together, under a hefty sun,
under slight muffling rain, to my teashop.
I worked on a cruising vessel one season
and saw a woman being led below
about a minute after she had vaulted
the rail, and now her face cluttered with casts
of hair returned to me, and a suggestion
of the odor of moist wool. Then, after
ordering, over the tinkle of service,
the ladies called me and began the question
of a particular person none had touched,
wondering by turns in words like these:

"Maybe when he was a child he went alone
one night along the lakeside or followed streams
in the dark and mating mayflies swarmed him
or he was caught by a swirl of slippery
animals risen from rotted cresses.
It could be too a bird's egg fell on him,
that red and yellow spattering his coat
showed him the partial form of brain and bill
and wings like candy arms." A second lady
established the problem but in studious
and in idle terms: "He must have tried
becoming a sphere once when something hurt
and must have failed. He is a cylinder
and lacking the perfected self-containment
of the sphere he nonetheless has beauty
and though incomplete is unassailable."
The third advanced the first with this addition:
"Maybe when he was a child and a good half
he planted a happy garden for himself
and tried to bring a boyish girl inside
to share his secrets he could not bestow."

The fourth supposed some more years and less hope
and figured on effects of disaffection:
"Perhaps it was a time sprouting potatoes
came creeping like things of the undersea
surrounding him that gave him the first fevered
turn toward what we now call his fine beauty."
The last lady came near to reconciling
them: "Some awareness certainly shook him
unawares once and he flinched and flinching
has made him beautiful to all of us
who admire huge eyed skittishness, the fawn
standing some steps off always awkward and
desired."

Odd gulls often join before
a gale to bank and shrill in company,
then at the heavy time of it they hush
and float broadcast. Those ladies did the same
the other Tuesday. Hopeless and breathless,
both I and they rode like sitting birds into
a last lull, and I was not (as you have seen)
prepared by quick calamities of ocean
labor for land bound suffering at ease.
Understanding or unconcern could serve
but pain and malice won, and who may be
forgiven even his shapeless victories?
"The boy is never by himself," I said,
"but by him stands an unseen friend whose face
came in the petal fall under a secret
tree, who meets his vague eyes with beaming gaps
and his remote grin with a long lipless smile."

Perhaps, when we the strangers in the bar's blue light
turn liberal, you'd claim fraternity
or clan and say Detroit is turned American
by the community of appetite.

There was this hurried time of fear of the last bell,
our sure prognostication it would be
somber so soon to face a sky of December
that impended on the light blue snow swell,

when someone turned and told of Caucasian wheat fields,
the harvest sun, a last effrontery.
His father decapitates their Turkish master.
The village is invested. No one yields.

Then, you may know, the last round came, and with it pride.
I swivelled round to face my own whiskey
recalling anecdotes in turn of ancestral
snowfields and running wolves and fireside.

RESURRECTION

Doctor? Well, yes: you must have heard that from my nephew.
It's true. It was at least. It wasn't medicine.
Why don't we have a little drink after the conference
if you have time? Back here, beside the elevator.

You're like my nephew. Both of you escaped the war,
you both rushed into business straight from school, and now
you're quick to be impressed by me, a scientist.
To you, who run to life, there's glory there, and there
is glory there that I can't tell. You've never heard
of Grubler. You were born when he left Germany
at just my age: "The old life had been buried," he said,
"by upstart men. I came where that life had never been."

Well he's an oldster now, perhaps retired by now,
a great zoologist. I followed him out West,
as an associate, in summer '41.
That expedition yielded me my doctorate.

I might as well recount that summer. There were two
female assistants and another candidate,
a friend of mine who fell in Germany: so while
the women read we worked. The first week we set up
the women's hut and our shack and the laboratory
where Grubler lived. The second week we did exploring:
mud flat, lower ridge, high ridge, hard rock outcropping,
crumbly rock, mud flat. Grubler hammered flags around.

For a week we dug and sifted by S. O. P.,
preserving fossil specimens and labelling them.
Then Grubler split a rock, and a pearly toad limped out,
alive, and cringed against the light (as we soon all did.)
"We'll call him Anastasios," said Grubler. I saw
him change: his beard untrimmed, the crew-cut overgrown.
He crawls from site to site for days. With stethescope
and a rubber mallet he auscultates the stone.

His labors paid: he soon uncovered Anastasia.
He kept the toads in one terrarium, forcep-fed
them agar-fattened grubs, increased the temperature
at intervals, and watched and cooed. When, in his walks,
he'd find a couple of the staff in one or other
of four combinations, he watched and cooed the same
"Be happy, children." Strangely, nothing germinal
survived our idle weeks, from field or laboratory.

No: who could expect it from that laboratory?
After a hundred-odd thousand quiet winters?
There was no negligence. "Let us collate our data,"
Grubler said. He laid the two toads in alcohol.

He spoke in the lazy tone he used when, next year,
we came in uniforms and doctoral robes to say
goodbye: "This was a false arising of my land.
It should be hidden, children, kill them." On the day
we left our camp, a real prospector appeared,
like Grubler's twin in checkered shirt and frayed Levi's.
You strike? "I hunted animals in barren country."
Gold grows where nothing else grows. "Then the camp is yours."

After the war I went into investments. Thank you:
I never married. Labor, failure, pleasure, danger
even, turn curious or charming in memory,
and only love is bleak. Thank you: business is lively.

On fresher nights I enjoy expenditions
in the park which our city,
as a prank perhaps, leaves dark
during the summertime,

(or to conserve electricity) and there
I trample the red clover
and riffle timothy, standing
to watch now where I think

a rabbit stood, now to purge my cold pipe
against an ironwood,
then I vanish. Whatever path
I take, invariably

I rest a while beside a kind of little
dollar lake, pretending
not to see the various doubled
shapes established among

the willows; but later couples, moving
stealthily, as they
suppose, into mysterious places,
will suddenly pivot

in awkward embraces, acknowledging
my residence, then vanish.
"How queer a thought," I say, "and how
peaceful, that I should be

one of the dubious haunters of the night,
one whose presence, welcomed
secretely, arouses fright
and lively reassurance,

like an appearance of the towering moon."
This I mumble and further
wisdom people scribble over
the backs of envelopes,

then scan dark water where more figures glide,
extending fading lines
that I read aloud as though
for some shrunken remembrance:

V *is one duck and* W *is two,*
X *is two ducks meeting,*
Y *is a duck that flew away,*
Z *is two who parted.*

The first commotion stirred him to offend,
forgivably, with friendly leaps and clutching;
but soon too urgent friendliness was wrought
by a new wave of guests. At last I complained
to that one man that it was indecent
of him to tempt the beast so, pressing his
tweed knee against the furry brisket. But
he smiled, and spoke with a Rhinelandish accent:

Milady, your youth, as mine did me, tends
you now to the younger beliefs of men,
their naive symbols: cloudy animal heads
to represent witless rampages of glands.
Egyptian Hershef, Seth, Ra — the romance
of anonymity above the neck
and smooth humanity below — were gods
of early hankering and youthful conscience.

See how the shaggy thing turns back his ears;
the straining mouth and eyes' protuberance
leave me my steady vision and clear speech
and mind. The aegipans, surely the centaurs
are truer concepts of the dual beast
and a maturer Hellas sculpted them:
potentially ironic man above
and hairy vitality below the waist.
No one, Milady, no lover on earth
does other than what I am doing now,
methodically tempting the brute, till from
the dim sheath an eager lick of flame darts forth.

I found a letter in a phone-booth a year ago
(it must have been in Shannon's *before they burned out*
last year) and here is what I still remember of it.
It was a young man's hand; I think a young-man name
was on the envelope, but there was no address.

I'm writing this because I'm drunk and not because
I can expect an answer. That choice devolves to you.
I'm sitting at the window table where we used
to watch the mob defile through Cadillac Square
on frosty afternoons. You might recall our pastime
of discovering which frowzy elder faces
that flickered by were counterparts of famous men's
in halftone stippled black on white and white in black.
Tonight the Square teems with fishflies and river fog.
I fancy it's like this in New York too tonight.

The window is like a water and Pernod, you'd say,
and so, instead, I'm looking in the pier glass where
I observe four persons at the bar behind me.
Two pitiless young men are watching two grotesques.
One is a lady in a floppy hat; one is
a little man who tells her someday he's going to wear
a tutu on the beach. This makes her thump her cane.
The two who watch watch with steady eyes, but one,
who has a suitcase, speaks. "What could I think?" he says.
"I couldn't think, could you? You know the lives we lead.

Last night he brought a new one home: not bad at all.
This morning when I cleaned I found tools and a new lock.
'This, my dear,' I said, 'is Mobilization Day.
Why wait till six?' I glued some gauze across the mirror.
'Let him observe tonight what I've seen half a year.' "
And so they carry on, those four. I am amused.
I thought perhaps you'd also find this interesting.
I wonder toward what fortuity or effort
or reassuring face you now look for bread and rest
and the inviolable life we must both soon find.

This year I visualize the writer in Palmer Park
now watching dim and bright green algae, now the sand
(buff in daylight, gold in sunlight, marked with black pebbles),
and the other watching passing subway station-lights
curve, reflected in his black umbrella handle.

You may stand at the door. It's the nature
of my ailment that I bruise at a touch.
You see I wear loose muslin and felt slippers.
Previously I wore inflated oilskin.
There are many here worse than I've ever been.

Noseless bums wander up and down at night,
unobtrusive ones that drool, and that peek
as if about to speak yet who really
expect me to be first to break silence.
I don't, for I've been warned against violence.

I'm told my trouble is nutritional.
You see how pudgy I am. The reason
is food and sleep: oranges (many of them),
and milk, and phenobarb.s, in eight small rations.
My hands are tied to help curb hurtful passions.

I'm asked what I can recall of my past.
I know I tried to cross a street but fell.
The traffic stopped. *Are you okay*? I said Yes.
The corner where I fell was Cass and Sproat.
I think before that I was on a boat.

And it's always *before* and *before then*
when they quiz me, and I burrow and burrow
to oblige. *Before the boat how was it*?
I believe that I was following a toad
in dewy Queen Anne's lace near a dusty road.

It's kind of you to visit me when many
right in this section are so much worse off.
Nobody's here at noon, and I get lonesome.
Have I or haven't I met you before?
Please, it's a rule: You must stay by the door.

These tall lilies, color
of salmon-flesh and of big domestic-ducks' feet,
concealing the nesting-places
of the mallards at present resident,
are observed by me reproducing themselves
by means of reflection on moving
pond-water. The pond is in a park. The park is
in the city Detroit

so in spring must have been
conspicuous beyond all else to the vagrant birds
of whom those who have mated stay.
In that section of dawn homologous
to this interval of early evening
I meander here alone to watch
long shy carp approaching land to nibble roots or trash
because these animals,

from actual rivers
which are continuous with the ocean at last
and through that articulated
to the long legs of the unique body
of free coherent water, are confined
in the fast circular system
of a pond, and because their moustaches are in
the same style as my own are.

This is the time of summer
when black and bloody mulberries litter the sidewalks
of a few better neighborhoods
embarrassing gentle passers-by by
their suggestion of particles of flesh
left from an unimaginable
feast or a fight or action of remorse enacted
on the terraces of leaves

above, but this is my time
to be watchful and casual as every summer
when I sojourn idle in my
native city like a plantation-worker
who returns to the jungle as each season
ends and never mingles the scheduled
life of the land with the aoristic existence
of his village. Likewise

the rest of the long year
I reside perforce farther north in Michigan
and westward, a sturdy country
which on maps is more conspicuous than home.
There I am contracted annually
as a strong disciplinarian,
teaching Caesar and literature and assisting
at Bible-school if need be.

The bodies of the children
whose characters I am hired to strengthen are grotesque:
faces eruptive, extremities
disproportionate, voices stridulous.
The ensemble, ugly with cruel abrupt
asynchronous growth, cripples their minds
which I am paid to fortify by means of Caesar,
leaving them helpless before

the orphaning ravages
of that minute fraction of their number that by luck
is beautiful, beautiful beyond
the possibility of castigation.
In the spring most of the boys are gone a week.
Duty bound, I demand parents'
excuses. At first I was annoyed. *Picking rocks*
they wrote, or *Picking stones.*

What is the meaning of this?
What kind of nonsense? *They come up in the thaw is all.*
You clean the land before you can plow
is all. All over up in Michigan
and through Wisconsin rocks in heaps or heaped
into fences are visible
from the highway. Certainly discipline will be
always upheld somehow.

A cold breeze shakes the water
as evening, deepening, turns the willow border
drab. People start for home. The cheers
of the mob of the Tigers and Baltimore
at Baltimore reverberate on the pond.
These cheers are a continuity,
like a river between here and there and like lakes
in the vicinity

of stations, and as diverse
radios tap this free flow in the atmosphere,
like individualities
siphoning the conjectural fountain-course
of living Spirit, the stream is not altered,
not diminished. In this city
where alarm-clocks may not be bought and sold on Sunday,
peace has to be assumed

through solidarity. Now
a woman leads a fat black longhaired-dachshund bitch
by the chilly pond, and when wind
frizzes her white hair and the dog fidgets
and I smile and some scrawny boys scooter
their bicycles closer and also
smile, she frees her pet and immediately regrets
having done so I think,

for while the animal
paddles half way out and struggles with her long wet leash
and length of clothesline, the lady says
He'll be back. He's coming back, and a boy says
That's no he. That's a she. The bitch approaches
the island of the pond. The mallards,
abandoning their nests, retreat across the pond
in order, silently.

Come on. Come on. He'll come back.
Below the high grown island bank she hesitates,
treading water, watching the rank
of strange tall lilies loom, sulk, twitch above her,
till she moans and returns. *You came, didn't you?*
Didn't he? Whining, the bitch shivers
off cold spray. A dog, tied to a bench, strangles himself
attempting to reach her.

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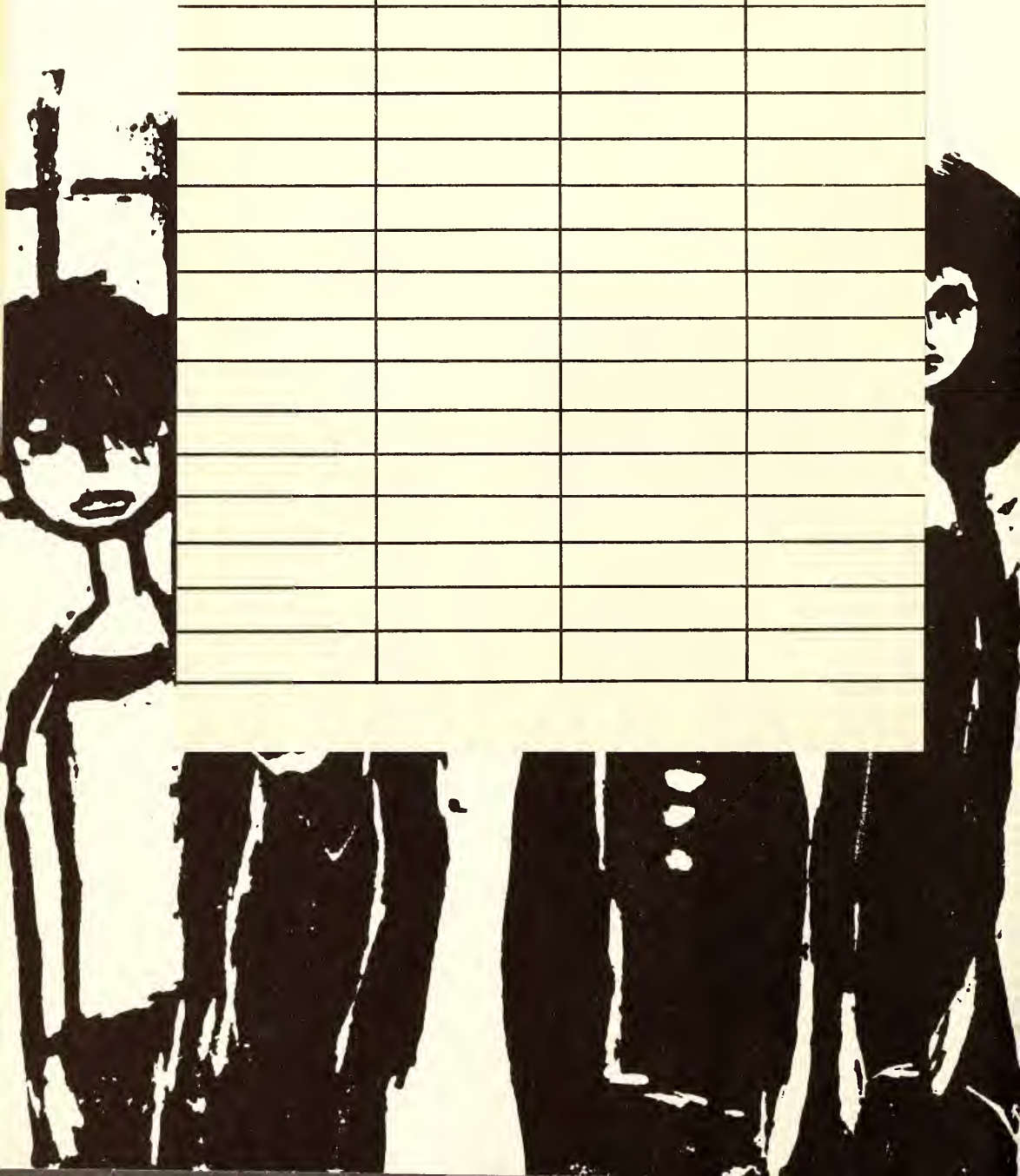

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